

Paulina's Children

At first, the women felt shy because Makhaya was working with them. But very soon he became their friend. They loved to stand round him, asking him questions about South Africa.

Paulina did not ask Makhaya questions. She stood and watched him. He was the man she wanted. She wanted to end her loneliness, that was true. But she wanted a kind man, one who would try to understand her.

Is Makhaya like that? Paulina thought. Or doesn't he need a woman of his own? Paulina thought about the women in South Africa, who wore make-up and smart clothes. But Makhaya works with the women of Golema Mmidi as though he is their brother.

Mma-Millipede was right, Paulina thought to herself. It is difficult to understand Makhaya. I must study him carefully.

When Makhaya had finished the shelves, he sat down with some small pieces of wood and took out his knife.

'What are you doing?' Paulina asked.

Makhaya held up a stick, which now looked like a little palm tree.

'The child's village has no trees,' Makhaya said. 'Will she like the ones I've made for her?'

'She will be very pleased, sir,' Paulina whispered.

'Take my wife home to my house, Mack,' Gilbert called out to Makhaya. 'She'll get you something to eat.'

At that moment, Paulina's little girl ran up and spoke quietly to her mother.

'Mama, who put trees in my village?' she asked.

'It was Gilbert's friend. Run after him and thank him.'

Then Paulina remembered that Gilbert was her guest.

'Will you have some tea before you go, Gilbert?' she asked politely.

Gilbert sat down.

'Yes, please,' he said.

Gilbert was worried about Paulina. Is she only helping with the tobacco because of Makhaya? If Makhaya becomes interested in another woman, what will happen?

'You're going to have a lot of hard work, Paulie,' Gilbert said to her. 'It won't be easy looking after a hundred women. I'd like to pay you to do this job. What do you think about that?'

Paulina smiled.

'I will take the money when we have sold the tobacco,' she said. 'But don't worry. The women will grow the tobacco. When they sell it, they will have more money. The people of Botswana like money, you know.'

Gilbert suddenly felt very happy. Good times were coming to Golema Mmidi. He drank the tea quickly and thanked Paulina. As Gilbert walked out of the yard, Paulina's little girl ran up to her mother again.

'Mama, Mama. Gilbert's friend is going to make grass for my little village. Then my animals can feed on it!' the little girl said excitedly.

Paulina felt very happy. The men of Botswana were not

Later that day, Gilbert came into the yard with Maria. Gilbert was very pleased to see that the first shed was nearly finished.

'This is only the beginning!' Gilbert said excitedly. 'Tobacco sheds will bring money to Golema Mmidi. And with more money, we can build new wells and store water. In a few years, the village will be like a beautiful garden!'

'Do you think we can build a hundred sheds before the rainy season, Mack?' Gilbert asked his friend. 'If we can, we can start growing tobacco this year.'

'I can't answer that, but the woman over there can,' Makhaya said, pointing to Paulina. 'Ask her to do it. She can do anything in this village. She even tried to make me eat worms for lunch!'

Gilbert laughed. He felt happy. Gilbert loved Botswana though it was a difficult place to live in.

The people of Botswana had to fight hard to live. The country was huge – so much of it was desert. Every plant had to be watered and looked after carefully. The people felt they could not win the fight. But Gilbert had to change that. They had to learn to fight harder – to try new ways to grow more food. Gilbert was not going to find it easy.

Gilbert walked across to Paulina and smiled.

'How many women are going to grow tobacco?' he asked her.

'Every woman in the village,' Paulina told him. 'We are the bravest. We have all smoked cigarettes and drunk beer like men. What we do now, the others will do later.'

'I've never smoked cigarettes,' Maria said quickly.

Gilbert understood what Maria was thinking. She knew that men thought Paulina was attractive. She was worried that Gilbert did too!

interested in children. This man, Makhaya, was so different. Then Paulina sighed.

Why should such a strange and interesting man love me? she thought. It isn't possible.

Little Lorato was working busily.

'What are you doing now?' Paulina asked. 'What's this? Knitting³⁶? You're doing it all wrong.'

'I'm making a cap,' the little girl said.

'A cap? Who for? A boyfriend?'

'No, Mama, it's for my brother, Isaac. He asked me to make him a cap. He's got a bad cold.'

Paulina did not answer. But she suddenly felt afraid. The cattle-post was so far away. Was Isaac ill? She picked up the knitting and began working quickly. In half an hour the cap was finished.

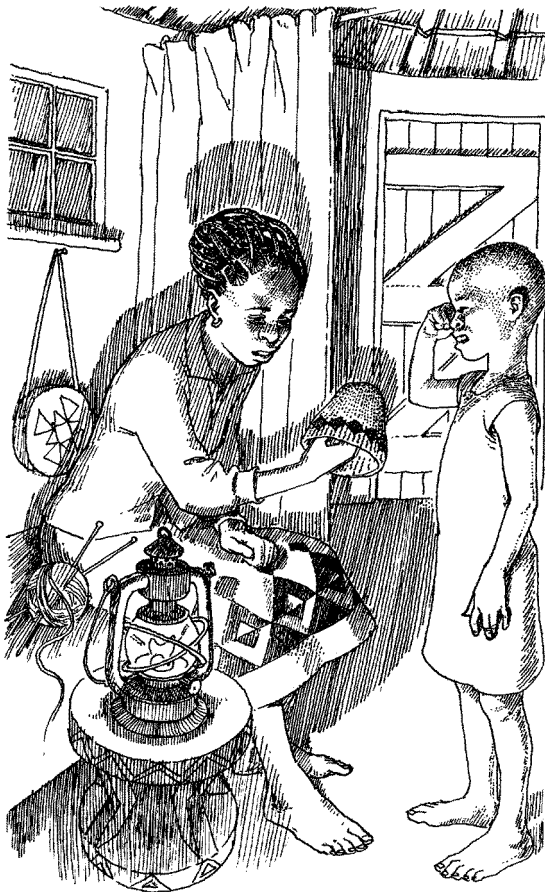
'There,' Paulina said. 'I'll send it to Isaac tomorrow. I'll say you did it. If he's ill, he needs the cap quickly, doesn't he?'

The little girl began to cry. For a moment, Paulina wanted to cry too. She was more lonely than her daughter, but she had to be strong. There was no place in her life for tears.

'Go to bed now,' Paulina said. 'And stop crying!'

Far away at the cattle-post, Isaac was already asleep in his hut. The night was cold, but the little boy had a high fever. He did not have a cold. He was dying of tuberculosis³⁷.

Black Dog



'There, I'll send it to Isaac tomorrow.'

It was July, the best month of the year. The winter sky was a clear blue and the light was soft.

In the cities of South Africa, Makhaya's thoughts had been full of murder and hate. But in Golema Mmidi, the young man had found peace.

Old Mma-Millipede watched Makhaya carefully. Then, one evening, she sent him a note.

Please try to visit me, my son. An old woman like me gets very lonely.

Your friend,

Mma-Millipede

Mma-Millipede was reading her little Bible when Makhaya stepped into her hut.

'Hello, Mama,' he said, with a kind smile.

'I'm surprised you've got time to visit an ugly, old woman like me,' Mma-Millipede answered.

'My dear, to me you are lovely,' Makhaya said in his quiet way. He sat down and watched the old woman pour out the tea. He picked up the Bible and said, 'Are you religious, Mama?'

'Well, I'm not a "good" woman, if that's what you mean,' the old woman told him. 'But I need something to help me understand life.'

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Makhaya pointed to his black skin and said, 'Because of this, people called me "Black Dog" and laughed at me. This blackness has filled my life with pain.'

Mma-Millipede could hear the anger in the young man's voice. She was black too, but no one had ever laughed at her. She placed her own black hand on the young man's.

'You are not a "black dog" to me, my dear,' she said. 'I have never seen such a handsome man. Don't worry about the laughter of fools. You are a good man, but you have one thing to learn – to love your brother.'

'And who is my brother?' Makhaya asked.

'Everyone on this earth,' the old woman answered.

'The poor are my brothers, I know,' Makhaya said. 'But I hate men who cheat and lie – whether they are black or white. Some black men use their power to cheat and steal. And what have white men brought to Africa except lies and death?'

But as he was speaking, Makhaya remembered Gilbert. He was a white man who was giving his life to Africa. Perhaps there was good in the human heart, after all.

Mma-Millipede never knew how much she had helped Makhaya. After his visit, he worked harder than ever and forgot his anger. If life in this one village could be made better, perhaps there was hope for the whole of Africa!

Paulina Sebeso soon had the women working in small groups. Dinorego was working with them too. Makhaya was now needed for another job.

In most rainy seasons, rain fell heavily. But most of the rain

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ran into the ground and was lost. Now Gilbert had a plan for storing this water. They were making large holes in the ground. These holes were going to be lined with mud and plastic bags filled with concrete. When the rain fell, the water would run into these storage holes.

All day long, Makhaya blasted holes in the hard ground with dynamite³⁸. He thought about his life in South Africa. He had once planned to use dynamite to blow up a power-station. Now he was using dynamite to bring life, not death, to Africa.

Makhaya was now friendly with all the women. He drank tea with them and sat by their fires. By now, he knew that Paulina loved him. At first, he had felt surprised. Makhaya had known many women, but none of them had loved him like this!

One Saturday afternoon, Makhaya was helping Paulina's little girl with her toy village. The man and the child worked together. Paulina was busy mixing sorgum and water for porridge.

Paulina looked up. Makhaya was standing beside her.

'Don't stop,' he said, 'I just wanted some tea. But I'll light the fire and make it.'

'Goodness! Don't touch the fire, that's woman's work!' Paulina exclaimed.

'Goodness!' Makhaya repeated with a smile. 'If I want tea, I'll make it.'

Paulina shook her head. This man, Makhaya, wanted to change everything. And he would do it too, with a few quiet words.

Makhaya turned away to watch the golden sunset. The sun was a big, yellow ball and the blue mists of evening filled the air. He felt happy, at peace with the world.

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The man and the child worked together.

'Here's your tea, my friend,' Paulina said.

Makhaya smiled and sat down with the woman and her little daughter.

'Where's your boy, Paulina?' Makhaya asked.

'He's at the cattle-post, looking after the cattle,' Paulina replied.

'He should be at school. How many animals do you have?'

'Eighty,' Paulina answered.

Makhaya thought for a moment and then he said, 'Eighty? They are worth nine hundred pounds. Sell them! Then the boy can go to school. You can make money in some other way.'

'Why do you care about my child?' Paulina asked him. 'Why do you want to help me? Each man helps himself in this world.'

'This is not my country,' Makhaya answered. 'I can leave tomorrow. But if you need my help, I'll stay here and help you.'

'Perhaps you should go away,' Paulina said. But she knew that if Makhaya went away she would die.

'You don't understand, Paulie,' Makhaya said. 'Poor people stay poor, because they don't know how to get rich. This is a very big country. Everyone can be rich. We can make a good life here. Sometimes I think I can do anything I want – anything at all.'

Paulina hid her face in her hands. This man was different from any other she had known. Then she suddenly stood up.

'Our job now is to keep the fire alight,' she said. 'There's food to be cooked. Will you eat with me, Makhaya?'